



Natural Talent Case Study

Name; Imogen Cavadino

Age; 26

Traineeship; Non-Marine Molluscs of Living Landscapes

Dates of traineeship; 25th January 2016 – 24th January 2017

About your traineeship



Can you give an overview of your Natural Talent UK traineeship? (What organisations are you placed with/type of work you will be involved in?)

I am placed with the Department of Natural Sciences, National Museum Cardiff. I will be working with Gwent Wildlife Trust and TCV volunteers on a range of research mini-projects looking at using non-marine molluscs (land snails and slugs, freshwater and brackish water snails, freshwater mussels and clams) as indicators of conservation success within the Living Landscape approach. I am delighted to have the chance to carry out research and outdoor fieldwork, examine the museum's collections, and participate in public events.

Why did you apply for a Natural Talent traineeship?

I graduated with a BA English and Music in 2011, and since then have been trying to gain employment in the wildlife and conservation sector. I was particularly excited by the subject of the traineeship, after doing some work on slug and snail identification in the past year. As part of this, I visited the National Museum Cardiff to meet with Ben Rowson, discuss the best methods for relaxing slug specimens and view the museum's mollusc collections. On seeing the Natural Talent Traineeship advertised, I jumped at the change to work with a collection of such international importance and to increase my mollusc ID skills by learning from experts. The research and public engagement elements appealed to me, as these are both skills I really enjoy.

What kind of employment were you in before undertaking a Natural Talent traineeship?

Before undertaking a Natural Talent traineeship, I studied for an MSc in Conservation Ecology at Oxford Brookes. It was here that I developed a fascination with molluscs! While studying I worked part-time as a university library "Shelving Assistant" and as an events waitress (mostly weddings). Most of my relevant experience has been voluntary so far, but jobs in the past have also included: bar staff, community energy surveyor, recycling promoter, and waste auditor (as unglamorous as it sounds!).

What voluntary experience had you done prior to your traineeship?

It took a lot of volunteering to get where I am today, starting with a 6 month full-time voluntary role as a Wildlife Officer with the charity ORCA, helping passengers spot and record whale and dolphins onboard passenger ships. I loved the combination of scientific research, citizen science and public engagement. I then built on this with a 6 month internship with the Sea Watch Foundation. Between these I volunteered in my local Red Cross charity shop, enjoying engaging with a variety of volunteers and customers. For many years I have been volunteering with local community groups, working with Wildlife Trusts, the local national park, Keep Wales Tidy and other organisations on terrestrial conservation projects. Throughout my studies in Oxford, I was involved in volunteering with local wildlife groups and attended as many courses as possible to



expand my wildlife knowledge. Most recently I have been involved with the setting up of wildlife friendly allotments in my local area, and the upkeep of a small nature pond.

What are you most looking forward to during your traineeship?

The opportunity to work with and learn from experts in the fields of non-marine molluscs is particularly exciting. I am looking forward to the opportunity to design and implement my own research projects, and designing them to fulfil the desires of the Wildlife Trusts and National Museum Cardiff. I am particularly looking forward to engaging with others, sharing my enthusiasm and getting them involved in my work.

What skills do you anticipate this traineeship will give you?

I'm anticipating gaining skills in identification and field craft of terrestrial and freshwater molluscs, experience in using identification resources and microscopes, and of handling samples. I'm hoping to increase my data handling skills, project design and analysis. I expect to build on my existing experiences of community engagement, with a change of focus for me from extolling the virtues of the lovable whales and dolphins, to the less loved but equally amazing slugs, snails and bivalves. I would like to develop the skills to share my passion and knowledge gained on non-marine molluscs with volunteers and members of the public, so they too feel enthused about these fascinating animals.

How do you feel your traineeship benefits the conservation sector in the United Kingdom?

The past decades have seen shifts in the mollusc species present in the UK and their ranges, linked to climate change, habitat and land use change, and the introduction of non-native species. Arguably, slugs and snails are one of the most unloved aspects of British Wildlife, but I think they are amazing and undervalued for the important roles they play in the ecosystem. As an undervalued group, the skills to identify mollusc species and identify these changes in species assemblages are at risk of being lost. I feel this traineeship is beneficial in spreading these essential identification skills, and increase recording effort by enthusing others with a passion for non-marine molluscs and encouraging future generations to have an interest in this little loved group. The research I will be carrying out may also have important implications on how conservation success can be measured by looking at the non-marine molluscs present and past records. It may also help fill knowledge gaps on habitat requirements for species, many of which remain a mystery!

What career path do you see yourself pursuing and how will this experience help you?

I see myself pursuing a career in ecological consultancy, though I am also intrigued by the idea of doing a PhD. This experience would allow me to gain specialist knowledge of non-marine molluscs, allowing me to build on my passion and providing me with an almost unique skill set. I would love to share this knowledge within the sector, and implement change in terms of surveying and managing habitats for mollusc species. The research aspects of this experience would also be incredibly useful experience in helping me towards doing a PhD if that is the path I decide to take.